



February 2012

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS
BUREAU OF AUTOMOTIVE REPAIR**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

SMOG CHECK PROGRAM

What is the Smog Check Program?

The Smog Check Program is an important part of the State's efforts to improve the air we breathe. Smog Check inspections are designed to identify and either repair or retire high polluting vehicles. The Smog Check Program has greatly reduced air pollution created by millions of cars in California. According to the California Air Resources Board, the program removes about 400 tons of smog-forming pollutants from California's air every day.

Who administers the Smog Check Program?

The California Department of Consumer Affairs, Bureau of Automotive Repair administers the Smog Check Program. Smog Check inspections are performed by approximately 8,000 independently-owned stations on approximately 10 million vehicles annually.

Is my vehicle subject to a Smog Check?

Gas-powered vehicles from model year 1976 and newer are subject to the Smog Check Program with the following exceptions: (1) Gas-powered vehicles six model years and newer are exempt from the biennial Smog Check inspection requirement. (2) Gas-powered vehicles four model years and newer are exempt from the change-of-ownership Smog Check inspection requirement. Diesel-powered vehicles 1998 and newer, up to 14,000 pounds gross vehicle weight rating are subject to the Smog Check Program. However, the gas-powered exemptions (see above) do not apply to diesel-powered vehicles.

Other exemptions to the Smog Check Program are two cylinder vehicles, electric-powered vehicles, two-cycle-powered vehicles (not including rotary engines), hybrid vehicles, and motorcycles.

How often does my vehicle have to be tested?

Your vehicle must be tested every other year. A Smog Check is also required if you sell your vehicle and it is more than four model years old. Some vehicles may require a Smog Check at a Test-Only or Gold Shield station.

What is a Test-Only station?

Test-Only stations are licensed Smog Check stations that are only allowed to test vehicles. If your vehicle fails an inspection at a Test-Only station, state law prohibits them from making repairs.

What is a Gold Shield station?

Gold Shield stations are licensed Smog Check stations that meet specified performance standards established by BAR. If you own a vehicle that has been directed to a Test-Only or Gold Shield station and choose to take the vehicle to a Gold Shield station, the test and repairs can be conveniently performed at one station. Gold Shield stations also repair vehicles that qualify for financial assistance under the Consumer Assistance Program (CAP).

Where can I find Test-Only and Gold Shield stations in my area?

To find either a Test-Only or Gold Shield station near you, visit www.smogcheck.ca.gov or call 800.952.5210.

How will I know if I need to take my car to a Test-Only or Gold Shield station?

Your Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) registration renewal indicates whether your vehicle must be inspected at a Test-Only or Gold Shield station.

How much does a Smog Check inspection cost?

The cost of a Smog Check inspection varies. Prices for Smog Checks are not regulated, so you should shop around. For a list of stations in your area, visit www.smogcheck.ca.gov or call 800.952.5210.

How can I help my vehicle pass a Smog Check?

Performing proper and regular vehicle maintenance according to your owner's manual and not tampering with the emissions control equipment are keys to passing Smog Check.

What happens if my vehicle fails a Smog Check?

In order to complete your registration, you will need to obtain the repairs necessary for the vehicle to pass its Smog Check retest. Before beginning repairs, find out if you are eligible to participate in the Consumer Assistance Program (CAP).

What is CAP?

CAP provides financial assistance for emissions-related repairs to qualified consumers who own a vehicle that fails a biennial (every other year) inspection.

Who can qualify?

You may qualify for up to \$500 in emissions-related repairs if you meet income eligibility requirements. If you qualify, you are subject to a \$20 co-payment.

Can I retire my vehicle if it is not worth repairing?

Yes, you may retire your vehicle at any time and for any reason if you and your vehicle meet eligibility requirements. If approved you may retire your vehicle for \$1,000 or \$1,500 if you meet the income eligibility requirements.

Must my vehicle fail a biennial Smog Check inspection in order for it to be retired?

Most vehicles can be retired at any time for any reason without first having failed a Smog Check inspection.

How can I obtain a CAP application?

To obtain a CAP application visit www.smogcheck.ca.gov or call 800.952.5210.

Are government-owned vehicles subject to the Smog Check Program?

Federal, state, county, city, and special district agencies that own or lease passenger vehicles or light duty trucks are subject to the provisions of the Smog Check Program. The Federal Clean Air Act and California Health and Safety Code section 44019 mandates that all subject vehicles receive a Smog Check inspection. These requirements include vehicles classified as emergency equipment.

I am in the military and stationed in California. Does my vehicle need to have a Smog Check inspection?

Vehicles owned by military personnel stationed in California must obtain a Smog Check inspection in order to obtain a base access decal.

What is [On-Board Diagnostics](#)?

On-Board Diagnostics (OBD) II is the second generation of self-diagnostic equipment requirements for California vehicles. On-board diagnostic capabilities are incorporated into the hardware and software of a vehicle's on-board computer to monitor virtually every component that can affect emission performance. OBD II routinely checks each component to verify that it is functioning properly. If a problem or malfunction is detected, the OBD II system illuminates a warning light on the vehicle instrument panel to alert the driver. This warning light typically displays the phrase "Check Engine" or "Service Engine Soon". The system also stores important information about the detected malfunction so that a repair technician can accurately find and fix the problem.

Who can I call if I am not satisfied with the testing or repair of my vehicle?

BAR's Field Operations and Enforcement Division investigates automotive-related repair complaints and ensures station compliance with the Smog Check Program. Each year, BAR handles approximately 15,000 complaints. BAR staff checks out every complaint and negotiates with the licensee on the consumer's behalf to achieve a mutual agreeable resolution. Each year, BAR secures \$6.3 million to California consumers in the form of direct refunds, rework, or adjustments. If you have concerns about the testing or repair of your vehicle, please contact the Department of Consumer Affairs at 916.952.5210 to obtain a complaint form.